

VARA CORPORATION LAUNCHES WITH ASSISTANCE FROM CEG
AND FUZEHUB

ABOUT VARA CORPORATION. Vara Safety is the Latham, New York-based manufacturer of a biometric-controlled gun holster called Reach. Reach uses strategically placed biometrics to properly secure the handgun, and still allow immediate release. Reach units are designed to be mounted in your home, office or vehicle and are made of high-strength metal alloy. In 2015, after Vara founder Timmy Oh interned at the Los Angeles Police Department and learned most officers do not safely store their firearms due to quick access concerns, he began developing plans for this technology to keep children safe in households with firearms. After this concept helped him win \$10,000 in the Smart Tech Challenges Foundation challenge, Oh made hundreds of prototypes.

THE CHALLENGE. In 2016, Oh's concept took first place at the \$100,000 New York State Business Plan Competition, beating more than 2,000 teams. With support from the UNY50 Leadership Network and Upstate Venture Connect helped Vara secure a major investor in New York City's Purritano Management. Seizing on this opportunity, Oh understood he needed to both build awareness and quickly iterate his design for manufacturing and assembly as well as identify suppliers and manufacturing partners. Vara turned to both the Center for Economic Growth (CEG) and Fuzehub, centers of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership of New York State, for assistance.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. CEG and Fuzehub engaged Vara in several areas. In 2018, Vara received venture pitch coaching through the Center for Economic Growth's VentureB series. Since 2002 CEG has engaged with over 250 companies in this program in collaboration with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where Oh was a student. Fuzehub engaged Vara in a solutions forum, which allowed for immediate interactions with resources such as suppliers, service providers and other state-funded programs. One particular connection was with the Workforce Development Institute (WDI), which awarded Vara a \$15,000 grant for the purchase of a three-axis CNC mill that would be used for product development and early production. CEG and VARA were also awarded a \$50,000 Fuzehub manufacturing grant from the Jeff Lawrence Innovation Fund, which was awarded to the Vara. The startup used that funding to quickly iterate to their MVP, employ design for manufacturing and assembly techniques, and workout critical manufacturing processes. On Aug. 31, 2019, Vara Safety began shipping the Reach units to more than 400 pre-order customers. The units are being sold directly via Vara Safety's website and on Optics

RESULTS



\$170,000 in cost savings
(includes \$50,000 Fuzehub grant)



\$65,000 in increased or retained sales



\$750,000 in new private equity investment



4 created or retained jobs

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"As a growing business, Vara Safety's progress was accelerated through the key support of the regional organizations in Upstate New York including the Center for Economic Growth, Fuzehub, Workforce Development Initiative, and Upstate Venture Connect."

-Timmy Oh, CEO